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ECA DE QUEIROZ AND
THE CORRESPONDENCE
OF FRADIQUE MENDES

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Eça de Queiroz and
"The Correspondence of
Fradique Mendes."

from

BY
EDGAR PRESTAGE

OF THE

LISBON ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

SHERRATT AND HUGHES
LONDON AND MANCHESTER

1906

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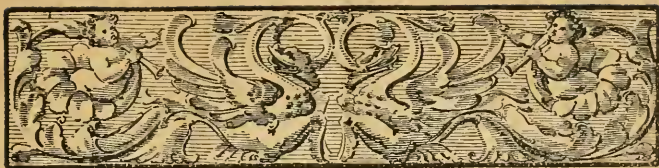
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EÇA DE QUEIROZ AND "THE CORRESPONDENCE OF FRADIQUE MENDES."

EÇA DE QUEIROZ, the Portuguese writer, was born in 1846 and produced his first work of account in collaboration with the art-critic, Ramalho Ortigão, in the "Farpas," a series of satirical and humorous sketches of phases of Portuguese social life. He founded the Realist School in Portugal by a powerful book, "The Crime of Father Amaro," which appeared in 1875, though it was actually written in 1871, during his residence at Leiria as Administrador de Concelho. Entering the consular service in 1872, Queiroz thenceforth spent the greater part of his life abroad. In 1874 he was transferred to Newcastle-on-Tyne, and in 1876 to Bristol, and he wrote his great romance, "Cousin Basil" and "The Maias" in this country, though they show no signs of English influence.

In 1888 he went as Consul-General to Paris, and settling at Neuilly, the novelist became chronicler and critic as well, and in all these capacities displayed an originality, power, and artistic finish unequalled in the contemporary literature of Portugal. Many of his pages, like those containing the episode of the return to Tormes in "The City and the Mountains," a book held by some to be his masterpiece, are already ranked as classic examples of Portuguese prose, and as a creator of characters he was

unsurpassed by any European writer of his generation in the same field. Though he manifested a predilection for drawing types of the middle class because of their more representative nature and greater variety, his portrait gallery comprises men and women of all social conditions. The "Maías" treats of "fidalgos," while his most remarkable character study is that of a menial servant, Juliana in "Cousin Basil." This last book and "The Crime of Father Amaro," are "*chroniques scandaleuses*," but, considered from the artistic standpoint, they are also creative achievements of a high order. The description of country life in the North of Portugal contained in "The City and the Mountains," is full of truth and poetry, and proves that Queiroz could depict simple things with consummate skill and deep feeling. It is noteworthy that, though he was a keen satirist of social ills, his books contain no trace of pessimism, but rather exhale an air of exuberant vitality and animal joy, the explanation being that he regarded satire as a weapon, not as an end. "The Relic" shows the influence of his journey to Palestine, and exemplifies the versatility of the man, for he appears there as an idealist and dreamer, a representative of that Celtic tradition which survives in the race, and has permeated the literature of his country. "The Mandarin," a fantastic variation of the old theme of a man self-sold to Satan, exhibits great imaginative power, but "The Correspondence of Fradique Mendes" will appear to many as the most fascinating volume he ever wrote, because it has in it so much of his very attractive personality. In conjunction with the poet Anthero de Quental and the critic Jayme Batalha Reis, now Consul-General of Portugal in London, Queiroz invented this smart man of the world, and made him write letters on all kinds of subjects to imaginary friends and relatives, to the delight of the public, many of

whom saw in him a mysterious new writer whose identity they were eager to discover. One of these letters is translated here to enable English readers to judge of Queiroz as a letter writer and satirist, since limitations of space make it impossible to present him as a novelist. The prototype of Pacheco may be found perhaps in the statesman Fontes, and the secret of Pacheco's influence in a country where every man is more or less of an orator, lay in the fact that he hardly ever spoke. Though the actual Pacheco never existed, yet now, as Disraeli said of Don Quixote, "he lives for us"—thanks to the talent of Eça de Queiroz.

His romances and short stories call for a translator. So far, the only versions that exist in English are one of "Cousin Basil" (Boston U.S.A., 1889) now out of print, one of "Sweet Miracle" already in its third edition, and one of "Our Lady of the Pillar" ("O Defunto"), recently published by Messrs. Archibald Constable & Co.

Here is the letter referred to above:—

To M. E. Mollinet,

Director of the Biographical & Historical Review.
Paris. September.

My dear M. Mollinet.

On my return from Fontainebleau last night I found a letter from your learned self asking in the name and interests of *The Biographical and Historical Review* who is this compatriot of mine, Pacheco (José Joaquim Alves Pacheco), whose death is being so widely and bitterly bemoaned in the Portuguese press, and you further desire to know what achievements, or foundations, or books, or ideas, or what increment to Portuguese civilisation were bequeathed by this Pacheco, whom such sounding and reverent tears have followed to the tomb.

I knew Pacheco casually and have before me, as in a resumé, his personality and life. Pacheco gave his country not a single achievement, foundation, book or idea. Pacheco was superior and illustrious among us only because *he had an immense talent*. And yet, my dear M. Mollinet, this talent, so proudly acclaimed by two generations, never gave a positive express and visible manifestation of its force. The immense talent of Pacheco remained always silent and retired in the depths of Pacheco! He passed through life, ever on the move from one social peak to another—Deputy, Director General, Minister, Governor of Banks, Councillor of State, Peer, Prime Minister. Pacheco *was* everything, *had* everything in this country which from afar and at his feet contemplated him, amazed at his immense talent. But in none of these posts did Pacheco ever find it necessary, either for his own advantage or for the urgencies of the State, to allow that immense talent which was suffocating his soul to display itself and work outside him. When friends, parties, newspapers, government offices, collective bodies, the compact mass of the nation, murmuring round Pacheco “What an immense talent”! invited him to enlarge its domain and fortune, Pacheco smiled, lowering his serious eyes behind his gold spectacles, and pursued his way, ever upwards, ever higher, from one institution to another, with his immense talent locked in his cranium as in a miser’s coffer. And this reserve, these smiles, these glittering spectacles sufficed the country, which felt and tasted in them the brilliant evidence of Pacheco’s talent.

This talent was born in Coimbra in the class of Natural Law on the morning when Pacheco, despising the “Sebenta”¹ asserted that “the 19th century was a century

1. The manuscript or lithographed lectures of the Professors, which after long use by the students, become dirty as if covered with suet (sebo).

of progress and light." His fellow students began at once to foresee and affirm in the Cafés of the Feira that Pacheco had great talents, and this admiration of his fellow students growing day by day and spreading, like all religious movements, from the impressionable multitude to the reasoning classes, from the young men to the Professors, gained Pacheco an easy prize at the end of the year. Thereupon the fame of this talent spread all over the University, which, seeing Pacheco always immersed in thought and already wearing spectacles, austere in his walk, and with stout commentaries under his arm, perceived the existence of a great mind concentrating and stiffening itself in inward strength. This generation of students, as it dispersed, carried with it through the country even to the remotest hamlets the news of the immense talent of Pacheco. And now in out of the way pharmacies in Trazos-Montes, and in gossiping barbers' shops in the Algarve, it was said with respect and hope: "So we have there a young fellow of immense talent called Pacheco, who has just taken his degree!"

Pacheco was ripe for Parliament and entered its bosom drawn in by a Government (I forget the one) which had succeeded at considerable expense and after many a stratagem in possessing itself of the precious talent of Pacheco. On the starry December night when the latter, now in Lisbon, repaired to the Café Martinho for tea and toast, an inquisitive whisper went round the tables: "That is Pacheco, the young fellow of immense talent!" And as soon as Parliament met, every eye, both on the Government and Opposition sides of the House, began to turn insistently, almost anxiously, towards Pacheco who, seated at the end of a bench, maintained the attitude of a recluse thinker, his arms crossed over his velvet waistcoat, his brow turned sideways, as though under the weight of the

riches it contained, and his spectacles glittering.

Finally one afternoon, when the reply to the King's Speech was under discussion, Pacheco moved as if to pull up a squint-eyed Priest who was haranguing about liberty. The Priest immediately stopped, full of deference; the shorthand writers eagerly strained their ears, and the whole House ceased its leisured whispers that the immense talent of Pacheco might display itself for the first time in a duly majestic silence. However, Pacheco did not squander his treasures at once. Standing up, with his finger thrust out (a mannerism characteristic of him), he affirmed, in a tone that betrayed an assurance of thought and intimate knowledge: "Authority must always coexist side by side with liberty!" It was little enough, certainly, but the House understood well that, beneath that brief resumé, there lay a world, a formidable world of solid ideas. He did not speak again for months—but his talent inspired the more respect, the more invisible and inaccessible it kept itself hidden in the depths, the rich and peopled depths of his being. The only resource then left to the devotees of this immense talent, (and they were already numberless), was to contemplate Pacheco's forehead, as one looks at the sky with the certainty that God is behind, disposing. The forehead of Pacheco presented a hairless surface, large and shining. And many a time, beside him, Councillors and Directors General muttered in their wonder, "No more is wanted! It is enough to see that forehead!" Pacheco straightway became a member of the principal Parliamentary Commissions, but, disdaining details, he never condescended to report upon a Bill. All he did was now and then in silence to take a slow note, and when he *did* emerge from his concentration, thrusting out his finger, it was to give forth some general idea on Order, Progress, Betterment or Economy. Here

was the evident attitude of an immense talent which, (as his friends said in secret, with a knowing wink of the eye), "is waiting up there, hovering!" For the rest, Pacheco himself, sketching with his fat hand the higher flight of a bird over thick woods, laid it down that "true talent ought only to know things superficially!"

This immense talent could not fail to assist the counsels of the Crown. In a recomposition of the Cabinet (brought about by a piece of speculation) Pacheco became Minister, and it was at once noticed how vastly his immense talent consolidated its power. In his portfolio (which was that of the Navy) Pacheco did not do "absolutely nothing" during the long months he filled it, as three or four bitter and narrowly positive minds insinuated, but for the first time, under this regime, the nation ceased to suffer doubt and uneasiness about our Colonial Empire. Why? Because it felt that at last the supreme interests of this Empire were confided to an immense talent, the immense talent of Pacheco. Seated on the Front Bench, Pacheco rarely departed from a replete and fruitful silence. At times, however, when the Opposition became clamorous, he unfolded his arms and slowly took a pencil note—and this note, traced with wisdom and the maturest thought, sufficed to confuse his opponents and force them to their seats. The fact is that the immense talent of Pacheco ended by inspiring a disciplinary terror in the House, Commissions, and political centres. Alas for the man upon whom that immense talent fell in anger; his humiliation was certain and irredeemable! One day a pedagogue proved it to his sorrow; he was bold enough to accuse the Minister of Home Affairs (Pacheco was then at the Home Office) of neglecting the instruction of the country. No accusation could be more hurtful to that great mind who, in his incisive succulent phrase, had taught that "a people without

Secondary Instruction is an incomplete people." Thrusting out his finger, (a mannerism characteristic of him), Pacheco crushed the rash man with this tremendous sentence: "I have only to say to the Hon. Member who censures me, that on matters of Public Instruction, while he makes a noise from those benches, I from my chair shed light!" I was there in the Gallery on this splendid occasion, and I never remember to have heard such impassioned and fervent rounds of applause in a human assembly. I believe it was a few days after this that Pacheco received the Grand Cross of the Order of S. Thiago.

The immense talent of Pacheco became little by little a national creed, and seeing what unshakeable support this talent lent to the institutions it served, all were anxious to secure it. Pacheco began to be a universal Director of Companies and Banks, and envied by the Crown, he penetrated into the Council of State. His own party eagerly called on him to become their leader, and even the other parties, with submissive reverence, had daily recourse to his immense talent. The nation little by little became concentrated in Pacheco.

And as he grew old and his influence and dignities increased, the country's admiration for his immense talent ended by taking certain forms of expression only proper to religion and love. When he was Prime Minister, there were devotees who pressed the palms of their hands to their breasts with unction, and turning the whites of their eyes to heaven, murmured piously, "What a talent!" Again there were admirers, who, closing their eyes and pressing a kiss on the ends of their clustered fingers, languorously stammered "Ah! what a talent!" And why hide it? There were others to whom that immense talent caused bitter irritation, as an excessive and disproportionate privilege. These latter I have heard shout out in their

fury, stamping on the ground, "Confound it! this is having too much talent!" Pacheco however had ceased to speak. He only smiled and each time his forehead grew larger.

I will not remind you of his incomparable career. It is enough for you, my dear M. Mollinet, to peruse our annals. In every institution, reform, foundation, work, you will find the name of Pacheco. The whole of Portugal, moral and social, is filled with Pacheco. Pacheco *was* all, *had* all. Certainly his talent was immense, but immense also was the gratitude his country showed. For the rest, Pacheco and Portugal mutually needed and completed one another. Without Portugal, Pacheco would not have been what he was among men, but, without Pacheco, Portugal would not be what she is among nations.

His old age was marked by an august character. He lost his hair, roots and all. He was all forehead. And more than ever he revealed his immense talent, even in the smallest things. I well remember one night (he was then Prime Minister) in the drawing room of the Countess of Arrôdes, when someone anxiously wished to know what he thought of Canovas del Castillo. Silently, majestically, with a smile only, he made a light horizontal cut in the air with his heavy hand. Immediately there rose around him a slow and wondering murmur of admiration. How many subtle, deeply-thought things were contained in that gesture. As for myself, after much searching, I interpreted it in this wise—"a mediocre, middle-sized man, M. Canovas." For mark you, my dear M. Mollinet, how that talent, while so vast, was at the same time so acute.

He burst. I mean he died, almost suddenly, without suffering, at the beginning of this hard winter. He was about to be created Marquis of Pacheco. The whole nation mourned him with infinite sorrow. He lies in St. John's Cemetery in a mausoleum on which, at the suggestion of

Councillor Accacio (in a letter to the *Diario de Noticias*) was sculptured a figure of Portugal weeping over genius!

Some months after Pacheco's death, I met his widow at Cintra in the house of Dr. Videira. She is a woman (my friends assure me) as intelligent as she is good. Fulfilling the duty of a Portuguese, I lamented, in the presence of this illustrious and affable lady, her irreparable loss and that of our country. But when I alluded with emotion to the immense talent of Pacheco, his widow, in quick astonishment, raised her eyes which she had kept lowered, and a fugitive, sad, almost pitying smile turned the corners of her pale mouth. Eternal discord of human destinies! This mediocre lady had never comprehended that immense talent.

Believe me, dear M. Mollinet,

Yours devotedly,

FRADIQUE.



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